

A Modern Interpretation of Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi's Philosophical and Sufi Heritage

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a scholarly analysis of the life, philosophical Sufi heritage, and contemporary relevance of the great thinker and mystic Ibn Arabi. It examines the philosopher's theory of *wahdat al-wujūd* (the unity of existence), his concept of the perfect human, his views on free will, and his ideas on just governance, as well as their significance in today's era of globalization. In addition, Ibn 'Arabi's works *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* and *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, along with contemporary scholarly research, are presented as primary sources. The study emphasizes that exploring Ibn 'Arabi's legacy serves as an important resource for nurturing the younger generation in the spirit of national and universal values, enriching their spiritual outlook, and strengthening ideals of social justice.

Keywords: Sufism; Thought; Enlightenment; Spirituality; Culture; Doctrine; Society; Patriotism; Ethics; Ibn Arabi; Philosophy; Mysticism.

1. Introduction

Today, in the Republic of Uzbekistan, as a result of large-scale reforms being implemented in many fields, including the development of science, our scientific outlook is expanding, and the scientific heritage of many of our ancestors is being studied and conveyed to both the academic community and the wider public. In particular, under the idea of the "New Uzbekistan", the scope of work in this area is steadily expanding. One of the pressing tasks today is to acquaint our youth with the scientific heritage of our ancestors and to instill in them the scholarly, spiritual, and cultural legacy created by the great figures of the past, so as to raise them into young people worthy of our homeland.

Translating and publishing numerous works left by centuries-old Islamic culture, scholars, thinkers, and revered saints, as well as conducting a range of new scientific studies based on them, has become a demand of the times. In human history, there are such great thinkers whose scientific heritage, works, and spiritual-enlightenment ideas and teachings live on for centuries, remaining relevant to the issues that have long occupied humanity's mind, and earning the attention and recognition of human society.

At the current stage of our country's development, reforms are being carried out to educate our youth in the spirit of deep knowledge and respect for our history and culture. These reforms also aim to cultivate high moral qualities such as patriotism and dedication, and to train specialists who appreciate the contributions of our ancestors to humanity.

1.1. Study Objective

The objectives of this study are as follows: 1) to analyze the socio-political context of Ibn Arabi's life, 2) to examine Ibn Arabi's metaphysical and philosophical views, 3) to highlight the concept of '*wahdat al-wujud*' in his thought, 4) to study the role of justice and social harmony in his philosophy, 5) to identify the relevance of his teachings for contemporary society, and 6) to assess the educational and spiritual implications of his work.

2. Methods

This study is aimed at a systematic analysis of the life of Ibn Arabi, his philosophical and Sufi views, and the socio-political conditions of the era in which he lived. As the methodological basis, the historical-biographical approach, the philosophical-analytical method, and comparative analysis techniques were employed. First of all, historical sources were studied to identify the political, religious, and cultural environment of al-Andalus and the Islamic world in the 12th–13th centuries, during which Ibn Arabi lived.

As the main sources, Ibn Arabi's works "Futuhāt al-Makkiyya", "Fusus al-Hikam", as well as other written monuments reflecting his era, were analyzed. In addition, the scholarly studies on Ibn Arabi's legacy by researchers such as A.D. Knysh, A. Smirnov, and Mahmud Ghurab were comparatively examined. In this process, Ibn Arabi's theory of "wahdat al-wujud", his concept of the perfect human, and his views on free will, justice, and authority were compared with modern philosophical approaches. In the course of the research, methods of textual analysis, historical contextualization, and hermeneutic interpretation were integrated. Particular attention was also given to determining the extent to which Ibn Arabi's assessments of the rulers and social processes of his time, as well as his Sufi-ethical recommendations, remain relevant in the present day.

3. Results and Discussion

Ibn Arabi (1165–1240) was a prominent thinker and Sufi who combined mysticism and philosophy to develop his own distinctive doctrine and spiritual path. He gained renown as the originator of the philosophical-Sufi theory of "wahdat al-wujud" (the unity of existence) and as the founder of the new "Akbariyya" order within Sufism. A systematic and scholarly study of Ibn Arabi's views and ideas on the human being, the world and existence, its various forms, the nature and essence of human existence, as well as the methods and effective approaches to cultivating the perfect human, is gaining increasing significance in today's globalizing world and in our society. [*wahdat al-wujud: the doctrine of the unity of existence] [*Perfect Man: al-insān al-kāmil, the ideal of spiritual and moral perfection]

Around the world, Ibn Arabi's teachings and scholarly legacy on the human being and human existence have been studied by a number of scholars. In particular, A. D. Knysh has conducted extensive research on Ibn Arabi's works. In addition to his numerous articles, he has authored several books aimed at revealing the essence of Ibn Arabi's views, ideas, and doctrines (University of Michigan, USA) [2]. Likewise, the research conducted by A. Smirnov was also extensive, focusing primarily on the translation and study of Ibn Arabi's legacy. By translating works such as "Fusūs al-Ḥikam" and "al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya", he examined the Sufi ideas put forward in them (Russia) [3]. In addition, among Arab scholars, Mahmoud Ghurab conducted a dedicated study of the issues and terminology that were widely used in Ibn Arabi's works and frequently employed in Sufi discourse. This played a significant role in making the mystic's writings easier to understand and in grasping their metaphorical meanings. Mahmoud Ghurab thus initiated a new stage in introducing the Sufi master to a broader audience [4].

The era in which Ibn Arabi lived was a period of transformation between the First and Second Renaissance, during which various socio-political processes unfolded in the Islamic world. In the states that had emerged as a result of

Islamic conquests, there prevailed a diversity of religious-educational, political-ideological, and intellectual currents. The Islamic world had expanded as far as Europe, giving rise to a diverse blend of cultural life in those regions.

One such place was the state of al-Andalus, corresponding to the southern territories of present-day Spain, where Ibn Arabi was born and raised. The initial stage of the formation of his worldview took place in the cities of Murcia and Seville (known in Arabic as Ishbiliyya).

In al-Andalus, disputes over the throne and various political claims among Muslims had weakened their rule, ushering in a period of uncertainty. The Almoravid and Almohad dynasties there were engaged in struggles against the Christian kingdoms. Ibn Arabi spent his youth under the rule of the Almohads in Seville. He moved between various cities of al-Andalus, which at that time were under Almohad control. In 1172, the Almohad dynasty captured the town of Seville, where Ibn Arabi was born, and brought a large part of al-Andalus under their control. In 1195, near Alarcos, they defeated the forces of King Alfonso VIII of Castile, achieving a major victory and thereby tipping the balance of power in favor of the Muslims.

In many of his works, Ibn Arabi does not mention the names of the rulers of his time, yet he expresses his views about them. His reflections are predominantly in the spirit of Sufism, in which he extols the essence of true kingship and the ideals of justice. For instance, in his work “al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya”, he wrote: “A king rules over the people, yet in reality he is appointed to serve them. If he sets aside the interests of the people and instead makes his own desires or wealth his goal, then he has failed to fulfill his duty” [5].

Ibn Arabi also at times openly criticized corrupt rulers. In the “Wisdom of David” chapter of his work “Fusūs al-Hikam”, referring to such rulers, he expressed the following deeply philosophical and advisory thought: “True kingship should exist not for the desires of the self or worldly interests, but for truth and justice. Rulers who forget this turn their power into tyranny” [6].

Many such reflections of Ibn Arabi, carrying significant meaning for rulers of all eras, can be found throughout his works. They could even be studied as a separate and independent subject of research, which in itself demonstrates the remarkable genius of Ibn Arabi.

Another of such reflections appears in his renowned work “al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya”. According to Ibn Arabi, no ruler can hold power without the will of God, yet this does not justify tyranny: “Every king is appointed by God’s will. However, whether he is good or bad depends on his own choice. Therefore, both the people and the king must be aware of their responsibilities” [7].

Ibn Arabi paid special attention to his contemporary, the most famous military commander and statesman, Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi, who liberated Jerusalem from the Crusaders and returned it to Muslim rule. He likened Salah al-Din’s political power to the power of God, undoubtedly one of the highest praises ever given to him, recorded in the pages of history. Writing about this great commander, he stated: “Indeed, God manifested His victory through him (Salah al-Din). Through him, He made Islam victorious. Through him, He conquered lands and humbled the unbelievers” [8].

From the above reflections of the thinker, we can see that he was not indifferent to the political processes of his time, on the contrary, he analyzed these events from his own Sufi and spiritual perspective and expressed his views on them.

The issues of human spiritual and physical perfection, human creation, essence, and role in society have been analyzed from a socio-philosophical perspective based on Ibn Arabi's ideas. It has been demonstrated that the concept of the "Perfect Man" ("al-insān al-kāmil") was first introduced into scholarly discourse by Ibn Arabi. According to the Sufi thinker, "the perfect human is synonymous with the concepts of "al-'aql al-awwal" (the First Intellect), "al-nafs al-awwal" (the First Soul), and "al-'aql al-kull" (the Universal Intellect)" [9]. For God Almighty first created the First Intellect from the divine light, and its form and image manifested in the likeness of the Perfect Man. Analyzing the human being, Ibn Arabi presented the following thought: "Know that among all living creatures, the human is distinguished by intellect and discernment. If he does not lose his discernment and does not succumb to his desires in pursuing his goals, he will always love what is best in deeds, highest in rank, and most refined among things" [10]. In Ibn Arabi's teachings, the most righteous act a person can do for himself is to never cease striving toward the ideal of becoming a perfect human, and to find no rest until he has brought this pursuit to completion. [*Perfect Man: al-insān al-kāmil, the ideal of spiritual and moral perfection]

Ibn Arabi divided his treatise "Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq" into the following eight chapters:

1. Vices (bad traits).
2. Virtues (good traits).
3. The appetitive soul.
4. The irascible soul.
5. The rational soul.
6. The types and categories of ethics.
7. Ways of acquiring virtues.
8. The qualities of the Perfect Man who embodies all good traits. [*Perfect Man: al-insān al-kāmil, the ideal of spiritual and moral perfection]

The era in which Ibn Arabi lived was marked by political instability, interfaith conflicts, the flourishing of Sufism, and processes of internal renewal within the Islamic world. It was in precisely such a complex environment that he developed his unique metaphysical and spiritual doctrine.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

4.1. Conclusion

1) In conclusion, it can be said that Ibn Arabi should be regarded not only as a prominent thinker and Sufi of his time, but also as a figure who left an indelible mark on the history of Islamic philosophy and Sufism. His doctrine of "wahdat al-wujud" (the unity of existence), the concept of the Perfect Man, his views on just kingship, and his

steadfast stance in the pursuit of truth have not lost their relevance even today. The ideas advanced in Ibn Arabi's works, particularly regarding state governance, inner human perfection, and social justice, hold deep spiritual and moral significance. He depicted the king as one who serves the interests of the people and openly criticized rulers driven by ego and worldly gain. Such views can serve as a school of moral example not only in his own time but also for today's leaders. [*wahdat al-wujud: the doctrine of the unity of existence] [*Perfect Man: al-insān al-kāmil, the ideal of spiritual and moral perfection]

2) Although Ibn Arabi's era was marked by political instability, interfaith conflicts, and cultural diversity, he drew divine wisdom from this complex reality and created a unique spiritual-metaphysical system. His high praise for Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi likewise reflects the thinker's adherence to the principles of justice and truth. In today's era of globalization, studying Ibn Arabi's legacy serves as an important source for educating the younger generation in the spirit of both national and universal values, broadening their intellectual horizons, and providing proper guidance on social and spiritual matters. Therefore, conducting an in-depth study of his works and conveying them to the wider public holds special significance in the current process of reforms.

4.2. Future Recommendations

Further issues, which may be considered in the future study, are the following:

- 1) Explore Ibn Arabi's influence on modern educational philosophy.
- 2) Investigate the relevance of Sufi principles in conflict resolution today.
- 3) Conduct comparative studies between Ibn Arabi and other medieval thinkers.
- 4) Analyze Ibn Arabi's concepts in the context of interfaith dialogue.
- 5) Examine how Ibn Arabi's teachings can address current ethical challenges.
- 6) Assess the impact of his works on contemporary Sufi orders.

Declarations

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Authors' contributions

Author's independent contribution.

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